

A CRUISE AMONG THE ISLANDS IN THE GREAT SALT LAKE

By J. Cecil Alter.

WE ALL love our Great Salt lake and not a breath of aught but praise has ever been published about her, yet we who know her best, while familiar with the exuberance of her bathing and the beauties of her sunsets are quite content as a rule to remain close to shore with our toes in the sand, for we know her to be a giant monster, and without a friendly port, when lashed into terrific fury by the occasional hard storm, though these come but once or twice a year.

And so, our solemn, silent prayers for protection appeared to be answered as we (seventeen languishers) filed down the pier to the motor boats lone and cozy at 8 p. m. and found Harvey L. Selley, the saltstained chief pilot, aglow with smiles, and noted a full moon rising into a quiet, cloudless, but smoke-smoked sky.

Go Fully Armed

Secretly, I had purchased an accident insurance policy for the occasion, and had fondly kissed the wife and boys goodbye, remembering only what I had "heard" about the violence of the briny demon when angry, forgetting that dangerous storms cross the lake only in winter or early springtime. But there was no time for memories nor promotions; the purser was counting us off and assigning us to quarters. Great boxes of grub and cases of bottles and extra clothing were packed in the cabin, and kodaks and other weapons were strewn about the craft within easy reach.

Most of the party persisted in climbing on the cabin roofs of the high riding, wobbly boats much to my mental discomfort, for it made me nervous to see how "reckless" they were.

The Trip Begins

"Let 'er go!" shouted the skipper, William Selley, Jr., and the eighteen-horse power gasoline engine began to sputter and I spied the chauffeur-pilot turning his steering wheel to guide the craft around the pier, athwart the pavilion, beyond the protruding bath-house piling to the north, and we were off! The small sister-craft, the Cozy, piloted by Blair Richardson, carrying about half our party was ahead of us. A feeling of safety and security began to steal over me as I noted with satisfaction that the engine was running true and evenly with pulsing beats that could only be heard and not felt, yet we were streaking the moonlit surface of the lake at eleven miles an hour. As my fear stole away a familiarity took its place and I crept bravely up on the steady gunwale and made a reconnoitering survey.

Confidence Restored

The lone is thirty feet long and seven feet wide, and as strong as a skyscraper—confidence was restored and I was happy. And later, as I sat on the cushions, dangling an arm over the taffrail in the spray, saw the boys lounging lazily atop the cabin (including 5-year-old Arthur Thibessen) and a couple of the stag party lying dreamily on the poop deck, while Harvey, the single-eyed, owl-eyed, salty-eyed pilot talked to his beloved lone through the rubber ropes and engine triggers, and I crept back to my quarters, feeling perfectly confident and prompt response to his every word or wish, I wondered why the fussy, fear-devil ever broke into my consciousness.

Some Day Dreams

And as I looked back toward the light-starred Saltair pavilion, now in the distance, a vast perspective of shimmering water lights, over our "wake" came the straight as a shaft of light; then into the clear sky to be greeted by the Gibson Girl, with her man, in the moon and feeling the cool, fresh sea air brushing all my foolishness away, I began to know some of that enchantment the novelists tell about when they introduce a maid and a man, a boat, on a lake, a moon, a few flowing curls, and whatever else is necessary—and from the quietude that had settled down on the boat, every soul aboard was apparently not aboard at all, but was soaring far aloft and broad in a wonderfully happy dream-land.

A Lonely Isle

From here the course changes almost directly inboard for a certain number of minutes, thence at a sharp angle out toward Beta Cassiopea in the sky for another definite period, making the channel until we were abreast of a small unnamed island, midway between the shore and Antelope island.

This island is about the size of a sheep coral and is so destitute of life and vegetation that even if a horned and could manage to find enough food to live on there, he would soon go glib with the loneliness.

The Ranch" Sighted

At 10 p. m., after a picturesque cruise along the eastern shore of Antelope island for six or eight miles, we sighted the wharfed catfish snow and the long pier at "The Ranch," owned by John E. Dooley, Jr., who owns the island. The ranch hands and evidently received wireless reports of our coming (some said they smiled



Teaching Them to Lead



The Lone

Pelican Posing

our ice box), and were out in a dory to meet us. Our pilot had the keys to the ranch, and we all marched ashore in the bright moonlight, drank from the springs of purest water, shook ripe apples from a half dozen trees, reviewed the barns, weighing yards and the mammoth buffalo pens and corrals, and inspected the ranch house, the milk cellar, the bunk house, harness rooms, blacksmith shop, granaries and henhouses, all built of stone and adobe before most of us were born, by Brigham Young.

Bit of History

It was here, during the Black Hawk Indian wars, that the Mormon pioneers were able to cache many of their animals and to grow crops that could not be touched by the Indians. The farming land contiguous to the ranch headquarters today covers a thousand acres or more, and apparently grows crops like a Missouri farmstead. The buffalo corrals are made of poles, which are from fifty to seventy feet in length and from one and one-half to two feet in diameter; wonderful pieces of timber. They are supported by three logs high, and the top log being about eight feet from the ground. Truly the fence is elephant-proof, for the logs were in many cases hoisted into position by special tackle or jacks.

Flotsam and Jetsam

"Where did these straight, stately logs come from?" was asked. "Oh, sh," our guide whispered. "They got away from the Lucin cutoff and washed up on the island shores in various places; they are piling which were intended for the cutoff construction." And it was perfectly plain that they were taken care of in that would erode down across the lake and "land" after a wild cruise of a week, what was to hinder their marching right over the island and doing all sorts of damage?

But we brought nothing ashore other than our appetites and our curiosities—kodaking at 11 p. m. being a failure. And at midnight sharp the last man swung aboard and we were off to the north again, with our two boats connected by a hawser to insure their making similar speeds in the night. As we steered around the broad, low cattle scow some one kindly explained that from forty to fifty head of animals were hauled at a single load from the island to the mainland by means of a little launch like ours as a tug; the scow is also used for freight. It is readily seen how one might erect a bungalow and transport it to the island on this scow whose displacement with twenty-five tons is only a few inches.

Snooze on Deck

"One a. m. and all is well," but we were all too sleepy to be sociable. A bunk was made on the cabin floor for four, and the rest snoozed on deck, except into the cabin—temperature about 112 degrees on account of the engine; noise, something like Buffalo Bill's machine guns turned loose in the Z. C. M. I. shoe factory; air, well it was plentiful, such as it was. Remains of several kinds of sandwiches were left to properly flavor the oil, gasoline and other odors. "And we turned in and slept," as Huckleberry Finn says.

Escort of Birds

In a few minutes they called us out—it was 3 a. m.—to see Egg island. We were passing between the scintillating rocks of the northeast end of Antelope island and Egg island, a short distance away to our right. Black cormorant, sea gulls



Fun With A Young Pelican

and blue herons by thousands were squalling and screeching weirdly, and many were flying about though it was night, some even daring to come within a few feet of us and flying along with us just to be sociable. This little island is just a pile of rocks a few acres in extent without a trace of vegetation in sight. However, since these birds seem to say in no uncertain language, "This is our little home," they keep the rocks perfectly whitewashed, and in the moonlight this field of snow-white boulders fairly alive with huge birds, and surrounded by water was a very interesting sight.

Day Breaks Gently

Not long after leaving the last bird behind us, day began breaking gently. Fremont island was to our right, being a high mountain peak lifting its head out of the lake; Promontory Point was just a few miles ahead; and a tiny dark line to the westward was the railroad on the trestle, the Lucin cutoff. This we reached in about six hours' sailing time from Saltair, a distance of about forty miles, most of the way pulling hard on a craft with a slower engine.

At Promontory point we breakfasted around a huge driftwood bonfire, took photographs at sunrise, and watched the trains go by. Promontory point is the peninsula from the north separating Bear River bay (the northeast arm of the lake) and the main lake to the west, and is the last land on the cut-off line of Ogden, though there are several miles of track across Bear river bay east of this point.

Plan Is Frustrated

The original intention was to grade the entire distance across this eastern arm of the lake but Bear river flow was too great and required considerable trussing to afford a flow at a safe speed toward into the main lake. As a result of this condition, Bear river bay is appreciably less saline now than the rest of the lake, and will ultimately become fresh. On Promontory point is a hotel for the railroad workers, and a postoffice for the trestle trackmen and watchmen and for the employees. It is five or six miles to Fremont island from here, yet during the construction of the cutoff, when foreign-ers were more numerous than gulls,



The Cozy

these workmen would lash a couple of cross ties together and paddle to Fremont island to steal sheep from the widow that owned the island.

Valuable Island

This, by the way, reminds us that Fremont is a valuable island for sheep-raising, and was originally discovered to be so, not a great many years ago, when a gentleman went there with his wife in search of his health. This was partially restored to him, but he finally passed away, and his wife buried him there. But her sheep-bolting had multiplied, and her own charms had certainly not diminished by her isolation there, and a prominent Lucin cutoff construction engineer grasped the "opportunity," sheep, worse. Another lone grave appears near the north end of Antelope island, also, Judge Wenner having gone there, with his wife, to recuperate his health, but finally passed away and was buried on that lonely place.

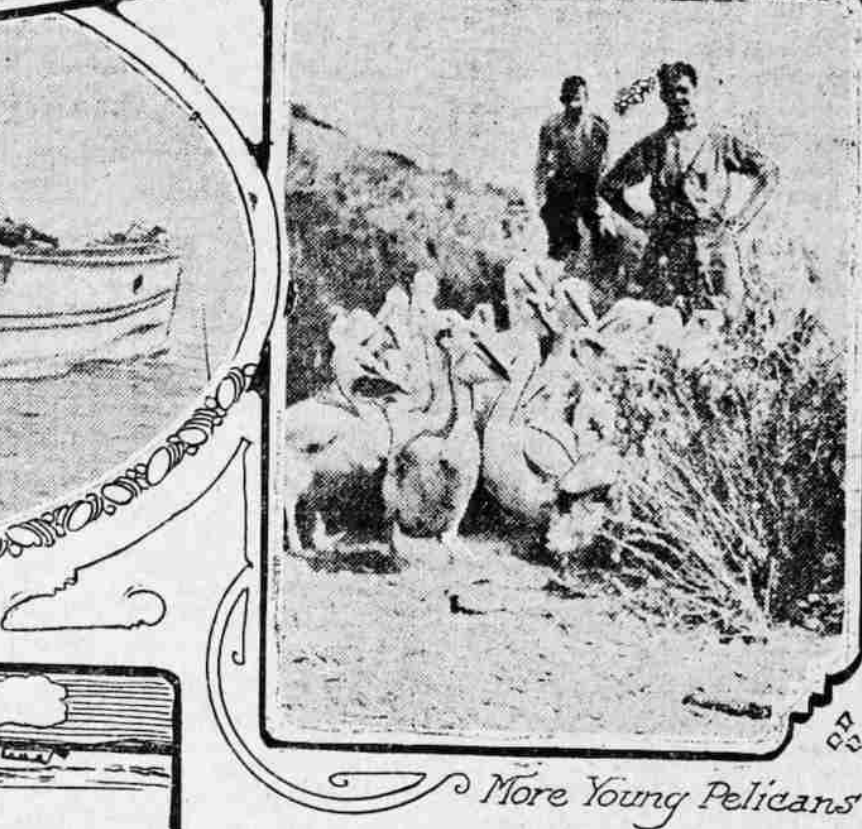
The Lucin Marvel

The Lucin cutoff from the water is well, it is just a string of piling, a railroad track sixteen or eighteen feet above the water, with about nine feet in the clear from the water to the framing timbers, and a neatly painted railing on top, all racing away toward the sunset out of sight in the perspective, yet a more memorable sight than one may never find, and as the morning passenger trains came howling along from the west over the trestle at half speed we pitied the sleeping passengers who could not see it as we were seeing it. We have often seen it from the train before, but never from a boat.

From the cutoff southward to the islands in the southwestern part of the



Young Pelicans



More Young Pelicans



Catching Young Herons

lake, across an untracked sea, we had our first real daylight experiences at sailing. Some of us having recently returned from Fish Lake, insisted on trolling a spinner, but others of more experience assured the anglers that the fish would not bite. And then Harvey very kindly explained that the little brine shrimp, which we could pick up in almost every handful of water, is the only life in the lake, and since they are no larger than ants, a shrimp salad from them would be a tedious proposition, though not at all an unwholesome one, he declared. I wasn't hungry.

Some New Birds

A quail—I should say clouds of quails—used to live on and near the surface of the water though they have with- in the past few months been almost exterminated by the little silvery-backed bird about the size of a sparrow, which now fly in great droves over the lake. These birds quite recently made their first appearance at the lake, coming, it is said, from Alaska. Great numbers of gulls and pelicans fly about, float on the water, and being careful never to get their bills under the surface, and loaf promiscuously everywhere, with no apparent regard for each other or for visitors.

When the cutoff was beyond the range of our kodaks, Mr. Flickinger took the wheel to let the pilot sleep. (No, dearie, pronounce it Flicking-er.) There is no bottom to be seen here the depth being about thirty-five feet and quite uniform. Here, also, a light wind gives a better wave action and one has an entirely new experience, for even a thirty-foot boat, well loaded as ours was, rides over and not through the big waves because of the great density of the water.

A little too much craning of the necks along here at the birds was re-

kind, for want of something better to eat, yet several deposits of small fish like minnows on the ground showed plainly what these pouches are accustomed to carrying. A carp, catfish, a foot long, was found in the fresh water streams that empty into the lake.

We noted with interest the provision made in the architecture of Mr. Pelican for catching fish and no water in his hammock. A vent or seepage hole about a meter or two in diameter at the extreme base of the pouch has a provision made not only for draining the water out at the wish of the owner, but of having a sort of manhole clamp wedged over it to prevent its being stopped up at any time by accident.

Pelican "Clutch"

Another "pelican point" not on the maps was noted when the boys caught a large fuzzy young one (weighing about thirty pounds and as big as a sheep), and filled its pouch with sand to see him tip the scales. He tumbled over on his nose needless to say, but by a deft muscular action he spread his lower jaws like a rattlesnake, rendering the pouch only about a half inch deep and ten inches wide and dumping all the sand out readily. Evidently this is the "clutch" he throws on when he is fishing in the creeks.

No food is found on this island and the countless thousands of birds subsist on fish brought from the streams in the pelican's pouches. Probably 20 per cent of the inhabitants are plump and pretty sea gulls. This is the Utah state bird, carefully protected by law, because this species came from the coast in the pioneer days and ate the grasshoppers which were devouring the crops.

Probably 5 per cent of the birds are blue herons, somewhat near the limit of bird monstrosities. They are about five feet long and not more than five inches in diameter after meals. The pelicans and sea gulls feed on all of the population of the island, and all young birds, apparently without complaint, probably on a contract, it would seem. And like the human attitude toward the trusts, the herons and gulls often steal what they get, from the fish dumped out from the pouches. Many gulls, however, do seem to be content around the lake shores and the islands in quest of food. Judging by their appearance the herons eat very little, except an occasional gossamer or cobweb floating in the air.

Panic Among Birds

At our approach the older birds kept a stone's throw away, and many thousands filled the sky, diving in all directions. Several hundred acres of the water surrounding the island was covered with spots of white, indicating pelicans and gulls. The gulls and herons and gulls, however, do seem to be content around the lake shores and the islands in quest of food. Judging by their appearance the herons eat very little, except an occasional gossamer or cobweb floating in the air.

Water Eats Metal

When I was again requested to "man" the pump, I asked about the leakage. It came in at the propeller box, I was told. The propeller is of solid brass and the box heavily babbitted, there being no other metal in contact with the water. The leakage slowly eats away nearly all metals, or diary nails or bolts being dissolved in a few weeks' time, even when heavily galvanized. But, fortunately, the opposite action is noted on wood especially when unprotected with paint. The cutoff piling and Saltair supports being in a better state of preservation than when first put in, and Saltair was erected nineteen years ago.

Great! No Seasickness

There is something refreshing in the lake air that prevents seasickness, for while the rocking motion is ever present, which at sea, makes so many folks feel as if they were "crossing the bar" no one has, so far as is known, experienced true seasickness in Great Salt Lake.

When we were ten miles or so south of the cutoff the bottom of the lake rises, the depth being about twenty feet—it looks eight—and remained so everywhere in our course within five or six miles of the shore and east sides of all land. The bottom is of white sand, with green patches of a slimy growth of some kind of animal-vegetable substance covering about half the bottom in well defined patches from six to ten feet across. But no bird, fish, nor animal will ever dive down to explore this growth for bugs or berries.

Perhaps the most interesting sights in the lake are the birds, which aristocratically have their summer homes and nesting grounds in this region of great sands; and with the countless thousands of birds that come in here from the ocean every spring, other countless thousands of young, accompany them back again to tidewater in the autumn. Hat or Bird island, which was in sight all the way from the cutoff, is about 800 feet long and 400 feet wide, composed of rocks and sand scantily covered with sage and greasewood. The highest point is probably forty feet above the lake, and part of the shore is quite rough, but there is an excellent beach along the "Pelican Point."

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